

SOCIOLOGY 329 Field Research and Methods of Data Collection

A digital version of this syllabus (with working links) is available on the course Canvas site

Class Meetings: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:30-10:50, Locy 111

Instructor: Doron Shiffer-Sebba (he/ him), Department of Sociology, 1808 Chicago Ave. Room 103. doron@northwestern.edu

Instructor Office Hours: Mondays 1:30-3:30pm. Sign up here.

(<https://calendar.app.google/gTb8WR2KcMiPMwuo7>)

Please use email to ask any questions or schedule an appointment if you cannot make regular office hours. I will do my best to respond within 24 hours M-F 9am-5pm.

TA: Mia Boyer-Edwards (she/ her), Locy 310. mia.boyeredwards@kellogg.northwestern.edu

TA Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:00-1:00pm. Alternative hours and Zoom option available upon request.

Synopsis

The best way to learn field methods is to conduct field research. Each of you will embark on a small project that will allow you to practice collecting data, analyzing data, and writing it up. Along the way you will learn about the complex challenges and rewarding experience of conducting qualitative research.

Learning Objectives

- Recognize when field methods are most appropriate.
- Develop skills of field methods data collection: observing, note-taking, listening, probing, and writing field notes.
- Develop skills for qualitative data analysis: interpreting, coding, and synthesizing.

- Develop skills of qualitative data presentation: selecting and editing data.
- Evaluate the rigor of field methods.

Schedule Overview

Date	Topic	Assignment Due
01/07 Week 1	What Are Field Methods?	-
01/14 Week 2	Doing Ethnography I	In Class Quiz
01/21 Week 3	Writing Field Notes	Field Notes I; Analytic Memo I
01/28 Week 4	Doing Ethnography II	Field Notes II; Analytic Memo II
02/04 Week 5	Doing Interviews I	Field Notes Comparison Memo
02/11 Week 6	Doing Interviews II	Interview Video + Guide
02/18 Week 7	Analyzing Qualitative Data	Interview Transcript
02/25 Week 8	Evaluating Field Methods	-
03/04 Week 9	Writing Up Ethnography and Interviews	*Final Memo Due 03/15

Readings

All readings for this course are available from Canvas or online through the Northwestern library except for *Listening to People (LTP)* by Annette Lareau (2021, University of Chicago Press), which can be found on course reserve in the library, borrowed using interlibrary loan through the library website, rented digitally from the University of Chicago Press for \$12.50, or purchased or rented at the Northwestern Bookstore.

Assessment

Please submit all assignments through Canvas, where you can also find detailed instructions for each assignment. Use of AI is not permitted in any assignment unless explicitly stated in the assignment instructions.

- 1) In-class quiz (due 01/14): **10%**

The quiz will test your understanding of what field methods are and when they are appropriate.

- 2) Two sets of field notes (due 01/21 and 01/28): **20%**
- 3) Two analytic memos (due 01/21 and 01/28) and a field notes comparison memo (due 02/04): **15%**

- 4) Interview video and interview guide (due 02/11): **10%**
- 5) Interview transcript (due 02/18): **5%**
- 6) Final memo (due 03/15): **20%**
- 7) Class participation: **20%**

Much of the learning for this course takes place through practical exercises in class. Attendance is one important component of class participation, but active involvement in exercises is also crucial. Class exercises often rely on readings.

Four unauthorized absences automatically result in the deduction of all participation points. Authorization can either be granted in advance or after the fact in case of emergency.

Full Schedule

Note: readings should be completed by the first class of the week they are listed under except for the first week's reading.

Week #1 01/07 What are field methods?

Becker, Howard. 1996. "The Epistemology of Qualitative Research." *Ethnography and human development: Context and meaning in social inquiry* 27: 53-71.

Small, Mario Luis. 2009. "How many cases do I need?" On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research." *Ethnography* 10(1): 5-38.

Jerolmack, C., & Khan, S. 2014. "Talk is cheap: Ethnography and the attitudinal fallacy." *Sociological Methods & Research* 43(2): 178-209.

Armstrong, Elizabeth A. and Laura T. Hamilton. 2013. Rush and the Party Scene (Chapter 3) In *Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Week #2 01/14 Doing Ethnography I

LTP, Chapters 1-2

Geertz, C. (1973) "Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture." In: *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 3-30.

Matthew Desmond. 2014 "Relational Ethnography". *Theory and Society* 43: 547-79.

Pattillo, Mary. 2007. The Black Bourgeoisie Meets the Truly Disadvantaged (Chapter 2) in *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Week #3 01/21 Writing Field Notes

LTP, Chapters 6 and 7

Gary Alan Fine, "Ten Lies of Ethnography". 1993. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22(3): 267-294.

Jerolmack, Colin. 2013. Do Not Feed the Pigeons (Chapter) in *The Global Pigeon*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Week #4 01/28 Doing Ethnography II

LTP, Chapter 3

Mitchell Duneier, "How Not to Lie with Ethnography," *Sociological Methodology* 41 (2011): 1-11.

Adjepong, Anima. 2019. "Invading ethnography: A queer of color reflexive practice." *Ethnography* 20(1): 27-46.

Week #5 02/04 Doing Interviews I

LTP, Chapters 4 and 5

Hoang, Kimberly. 2022. Moral Dilemmas and Regimes of Justification (Chapter 6) in *Spiderweb Capitalism: : How Global Elites Exploit Frontier Markets*. Princeton University Press.

Week #6 02/11 Doing Interviews II

Lamont, Michele. 1992. The Importance of Being Honest: Keys to Moral Boundaries (Chapter 2) in *Money, Morals, and Manners : the Culture of the French and American Upper-Middle Class*. University of Chicago Press.

Week #7 02/18 Analyzing Qualitative Data

LTP, Chapter 8

Khan, Shamus. 2011. The Ease of Privilege (Chapter 3) in *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*. Princeton University Press.

Week #8 02/25 Evaluating Field Methods

Small, Mario, and Jessica Calarco. 2022. Chapters 1 & 2 in *Qualitative Literacy: A Guide to Evaluating Ethnographic and Interview Research*. University of California Press.

Desmond, Matthew. 2016. Order Some Carryout (Chapter 9) in *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. New York: Crown.

Week #9 03/04 Writing Up Ethnography and Interviews

** Bring computer to class this week*

LTP, Chapter 9 and 10

Student Feedback

Feedback “quiz” can be found on Canvas under the “General” module.

Policies

This course follows the Northwestern University Syllabus Standards. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with this information.

Missing four or more classes and/ or two or more assignments puts students at risk of not meeting the learning objectives of the course. Students in this position should talk with their college advisor.

No Tech Classroom

Computers, phones, and other tech with internet browsing or games is not permitted in this classroom except under special circumstances. These tools may be used for certain in-class activities.

Grade Disputes

If you are not satisfied with a grade on a given assignment, you may request a re-grade. For a given assignment, all submissions that have requested a re-grade are graded anonymously by someone who has not graded them before (either a TA, instructor, or external faculty). NOTE: *a re-grade may result in a lower grade*, it is not guaranteed to stay at or above the original grade.